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States consider 'safe injection sites' to prevent overdoses



A sign on the wall reads "This site save lives" in Spanish and English at an overdose prevention center at OnPoint NYC in New York, Feb. 18, 2022.

Associated Press

Beauty & the Beach



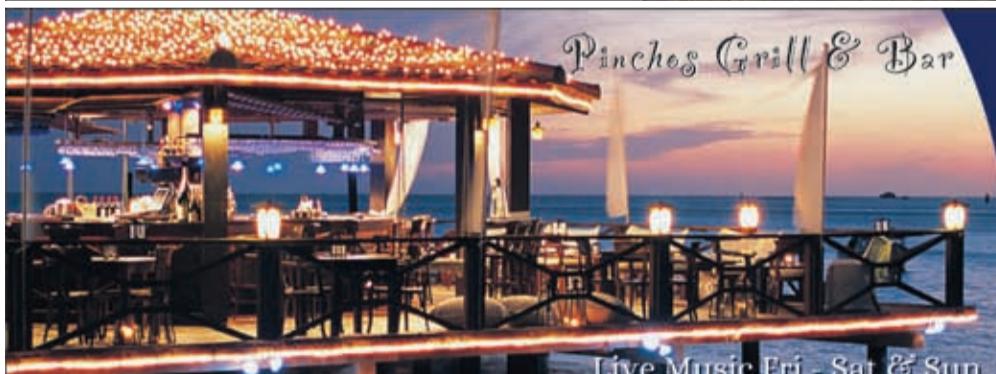
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History of fishing in Aruba



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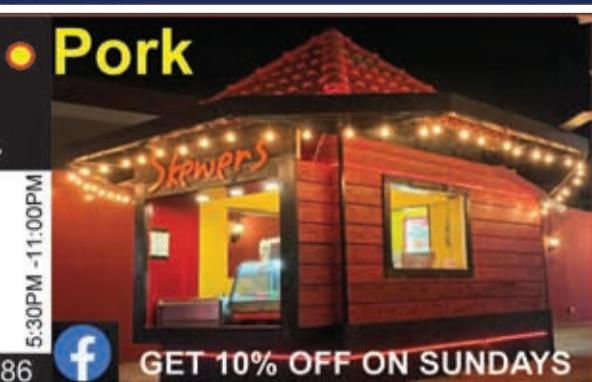


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States consider 'safe injection sites' to prevent overdoses

From Front

By JESSE BEDAYN
Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — In a Colorado mountain town, Christine Collins injected herself with black tar heroin while hanging out with friends in her cozy basement a few days after her 30th birthday. Sitting beneath a Happy Birthday sign with hearts scrawled in colorful sharpies, she overdosed.

She awoke to the screams of her friends who fumbled to administer doses of naloxone, which reversed the overdose and pulled Collins back from near death. She has seen dozens of friends wake up from overdoses, and known dozens more that never did.

Such scenes of terror have increasingly played out from Denver's snow-filled streets to rural towns in West Virginia, with drug overdoses killing over an estimated 100,000 people in 2021, according federal health official's latest data. That's roughly one overdose death every five minutes.

The snowballing death toll has pushed lawmakers in Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada to consider joining New York and Rhode Island in allowing what are often called "safe injection sites." Also called "overdose prevention centers," these are places where people can use drugs under the supervision of trained staff who could reverse an overdose if necessary.

Lawmakers in Colorado's



Brian Hackel, right, an overdose prevention specialist, helps Steven Baez, a client suffering addiction, find a vein to inject intravenous drugs at an overdose prevention center, OnPoint NYC, in New York, Feb. 18, 2022.

Democrat-controlled Legislature are set to discuss the controversial proposal Wednesday as the measure faces steep odds amid broad backlash from police, Republicans, and lingering questions about whether the sites are even legal in the United States. The idea of sanctioning the use of drugs including heroin and methamphetamine on these sites — an about-face from the long-waged war on drugs — has garnered stiff pushback. "You're basically sending a message that, 'Hey, it's okay to do this,' which has a negative impact on the users' health, it encourages the drug dealer, and then it still provides that danger to the rest of the community," said Colorado Rep. Gabe Evans, a Republican and

former police officer. But proponents argue it's an imperative first step to tackling drug use, with many repeating a one-argument refrain.

"You can't enter treatment if you are dead," said Dr. Joshua Barocas, an associate professor at the University of Colorado who studies substance use disorder. "All the data suggests that people are going to do drugs regardless... All we are trying to do is reverse the harm that could come from what people are already doing."

The trend is growing internationally with centers in Canada, Australia and Europe, but in the U.S. questions remain over whether the Department of Justice will permit such programs amid pushback that the

sites merely enable illegal drug use and attract the ancillary crime.

Last year, the Justice Department told The Associated Press it was "evaluating" such facilities and talking to regulators about "appropriate guardrails." The department did not immediately respond to requests for updated information from the AP this week. Being open to evaluating the sites marks a shift from the Justice Department's posture under former President Donald Trump, when the department fought against such a proposal in Pennsylvania, arguing that such facilities violate a 1980s-era law which bans operating a place for taking illegal drugs.

Data from sites both in and outside the U.S. found that

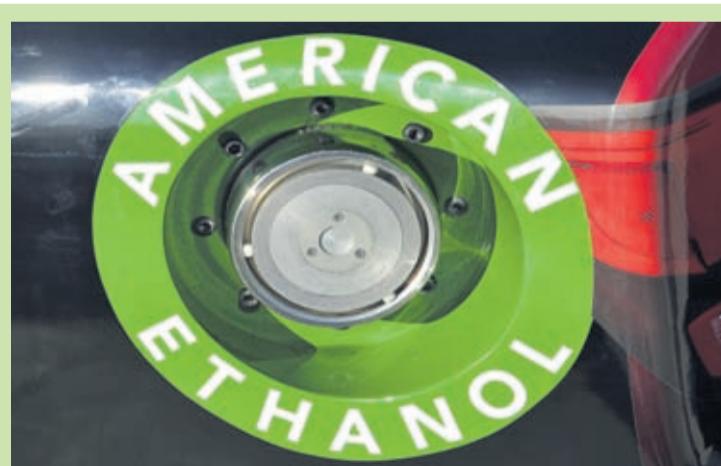
they can prevent overdoses, with New York City's centers stopping more than 150 in their tracks within three months of operating. The centers also typically include equipment, such as sterile syringes, and offer resources for drug users to find treatment.

Existing studies, such as a 2021 report from the Boston-based Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, show that sites are linked to fewer ambulance calls — potentially saving tax payer dollars — and didn't metastasize various crime rates in neighborhoods of operation.

In Nevada's Democratic-controlled Legislature a proposal to legalize safe injection sites is on the table but has yet to get a hearing, one year after a similar push failed. In New Mexico, a similar bill faces unknown prospects.

Even while a long list of healthcare organizations have signed on in support of Colorado's bill — including the Colorado Nurses Association, Colorado Psychiatric Society and Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council — the legislation faces an uphill battle.

While Democrats in Colorado hold majorities in both chambers, Gov. Jared Polis has vocalized his concern over the proposal. The governor's spokesperson, Conor Cahill, said in a statement Monday that the governor "would be deeply concerned with any approach that would contribute to more drug use and lawlessness." □



An American Ethanol label is shown on a NASCAR race car gas tank at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, Texas, Nov. 1, 2014.

Associated Press

Midwest could add more ethanol to gasoline under EPA plan

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Gasoline with higher blends of ethanol could be sold year-round in eight Midwestern states beginning in 2024 under a rule proposed Wednesday by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The proposed rule is a victory for the biofuels indus-

try, which for years has pushed to allow sales of gasoline blended with 15% ethanol during the summer, which hasn't been allowed because of concerns that it would worsen smog during hot weather. The industry and members of Congress welcomed the EPA's proposal, which had been requested by governors in the eight states, but

they questioned why the new rules couldn't begin this summer.

The American Coalition for Ethanol said in a statement that the group appreciated the EPA's proposal but argued there was no reason to wait until 2024. The group accused the agency of delaying the action because of pressure from the petroleum industry. □

Intel agencies: No sign adversaries behind 'Havana syndrome'

By NOMAAN MERCHANT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. intelligence agencies cannot link a foreign adversary to any of the incidents associated with so-called "Havana syndrome," the hundreds of cases of brain injuries and other symptoms reported by American personnel around the world.

The findings released Wednesday by U.S. intelligence officials cast doubt on the longstanding suspicions by many people who reported cases that Russia or another country may have been running a global campaign to harass or attack Americans using some form of directed energy. Most of the cases investigated appear to have different causes, from environmental factors to undiagnosed illnesses, said the officials, who say they have not found a single explanation for most or all of the reports.

Instead, officials say, there is evidence that foreign countries were not involved. In some cases, the U.S. detected among adversarial governments confusion about the allegations and suspicions that Havana syndrome was an American plot. And investigators found "no credible evidence" that any adversary had obtained a weapon that could cause the reported symptoms or a listening device that might



Tourists ride classic convertible cars on the Malecon beside the United States Embassy in Havana, Cuba, Oct. 3, 2017.

inadvertently injure people. The Biden administration has been under pressure to respond to Havana syndrome cases from government personnel who have reported injuries and their advocates, including members of Congress. President Joe Biden in 2021 signed into law the HAVANA Act, which provided compensation to people deemed to have sustained injuries consistent with what the government calls "anomalous health incidents." Mark Zaid, a lawyer for more than two dozen people who have reported injuries, said the new assessment lacked transparency and left key questions unanswered.

"Until the shrouds of secrecy are lifted and the analysis that led to today's assertions are available and subject to proper challenge, the alleged conclusions are substantively worthless," he said in a statement. "But the damage it has caused to the morale of the victims, particularly by deflecting from the government's failure to evaluate all the evidence, is real and must be condemned."

Two officials familiar with the assessment briefed reporters Wednesday on condition of anonymity, under ground rules set by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence.

Investigators reviewed roughly 1,500 cases in 96

countries. Many of those cases, officials said, have been linked to other potential explanations aside from a foreign campaign: medical illnesses, malfunctioning air conditioning and ventilation systems, or electromagnetic waves coming from benign devices like a computer mouse. And some people may have come forward to report symptoms based on what they had heard about other cases or the exhaustive media reports about Havana syndrome, officials said.

A core group of roughly two dozen cases identified in an interim assessment published last year has been exhaustively studied,

Associated Press

officials said. None of the cases was linked to an attack by an adversary.

The officials stressed their investigation was exhaustive, with participation from seven U.S. agencies. One official described reviewing a report from an American who reported having possibly been hit by a car while driving. U.S. investigators tracked down the car and the driver and investigated that person's family connections and any foreign travel, the official said.

Some leads were followed for as long as nine months, the official said.

Officials briefing reporters declined to say how the latest assessment, first reported by The Washington Post, may affect payments under the HAVANA Act. The State Department has compensated affected employees with one-time payments from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

The leaders of the House Intelligence Committee insisted that "there should be no change" to compensation while they review the assessment.

"We will seek to ensure the review was conducted with the highest degree of analytical rigor and that it considered all the available intelligence and perspectives, documenting all substantial differences in analysis," said Reps. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, and Jim Himes, D-Conn., in their statement. □

Air Force relieves 6 officers at nuclear base after lapses

By TARA COPP

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Six Air Force officers who were in charge of caring for the infrastructure, fuel and logistics support for a North Dakota nuclear missile base were relieved of command due to a loss of confidence in their ability to carry out their responsibilities, the Air Force said.

The officers include two commanders and four subordinate officers at Minot Air Force Base, including

5th Mission Support Group commander Col. Gregory Mayer and 5th Logistics Readiness Squadron Maj. Jonathan Welch, a defense official said. The four subordinate officers were not identified.

The official said the dismissals were based on non-compliance with safety regulations for vehicles and equipment, and while the decision to relieve the officers of command was based on the results of one safety inspection, the units

had not been compliant for some time. The official was not authorized to discuss details of the firings publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In 2007, a B-52 Stratofortress took off from Minot mistakenly loaded with six nuclear-armed AGM-129 cruise missiles and flew across the country to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. In 2014, a nuclear safety inspection cheating scandal at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana embroiled



A U.S. Air Force B-52H "Stratofortress" from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., is refueled by a KC-135 "Stratotanker" in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, Dec. 30, 2020.

Associated Press

scores of missileers and officers, and in 2016, investigators busted an LSD drug ring at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming. Minot,

Malmstrom and F.E. Warren are home to a total of 450 silo-based Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles. □

States move to crack down on nurses with bogus diplomas

By MICHAEL HILL
Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Medical licensing officials in multiple states are scrambling to stop nurses with fraudulent academic credentials from caring for patients, after three Florida schools were accused of selling thousands of bogus diplomas.

New York regulators told 903 nurses in recent weeks to either surrender their licenses or prove they were properly educated. Delaware and Washington state officials have yanked dozens of nursing licenses. Texas filed administrative charges against 23 nurses. More actions in additional states are expected.

In some cases, lawyers for the nurses contend states are questioning the credentials of caregivers who earned diplomas legitimately. But there's wide agreement in the industry that nurses with fraudulent degrees need to be rooted out.

"The public needs to know that when they're the most fragile, when they're sick, when they're in a hospital bed, that the individual who is at their bedside has gone through the required training," said Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, president of the American Nurses Association union.

States are acting in the wake of Operation Nightingale, a federal investigation



U.S. Attorney Markenzy Lapointe speaks about a network of nursing school operators, centered in South Florida, who allowed students to buy diplomas without the proper training, during a press conference in Miami, Jan. 25, 2023.

Associated Press

into what officials say was a wire fraud scheme in which several now-closed Florida nursing schools sold phony nursing diplomas and transcripts from 2016 to 2022. Twenty-five defendants, including school owners and alleged recruiters, have been charged. U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida Markenzy Lapointe announced in late January. Those cases are pending.

About 7,600 students paid an average of \$15,000 for bogus diplomas, according to prosecutors. Around 2,400 of those people then passed a licensing exam to

obtain jobs as registered nurses and licensed practical nurses or vocational nurses in multiple states, prosecutors say.

How did so many test takers pass without the required classroom and clinical work? In some cases, they were experienced L.P.N.s seeking to become R.N.s. Some had been health care providers in other countries.

The nurses got jobs across the country, including at a hospital in Georgia, Veterans Affairs medical centers in Maryland and New York, a skilled nursing facility in Ohio, and an assisted living

facility in New Jersey, according to court filings.

Students came not only from Florida, but also New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas and Delaware. Many of the students took their licensing exam in New York, where they can sit it multiple times, according to investigators.

Investigators identified the Florida nursing schools as the Palm Beach School of Nursing; Siena College, a school in Broward County that wasn't related to the college of the same name in New York; and the Sacred Heart International Institute, which was also

based in Broward County and had no relation to a university with a similar name in Connecticut.

It was not entirely clear how many of the roughly 2,400 nurses with credentials from these schools are currently employed, or where.

Federal officials shared information so states could pursue nurses with phony academic credentials. Some states have taken action.

The Washington State Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission rescinded the R.N. licenses of 17 people and denied license applications for four. The Delaware Board of Nursing annulled 26 licenses. The Georgia Board of Nursing asked 22 nurses to voluntarily surrender their licenses.

The 23 nurses facing possible license revocations in Texas can continue working while their disciplinary cases are pending. Texas Board of Nursing general counsel James "Dusty" Johnston said more charges could come as officials develop "the necessary information for each individual."

A spokesperson for Veterans Affairs said it removed 89 nurses "from patient care" nationwide last year immediately after being notified by federal officials. The agency has not found any instances of patients being harmed. □



Cherry blossoms are visible along Hains Point in Washington, Monday, Feb. 27, 2023.

By ASHRAF KHALIL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The cherry trees in the nation's capital are confused by

Associated Press

Earth's changing climate, with the iconic blossoms appearing earlier than expected because of the unusually warm winter.

DC's cherry blossoms coming early due to confusing weather

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser and the National Park Service announced Wednesday that Washington's 3,700 cherry blossom trees would reach peak bloom this year from March 22-25. That's several days earlier than observers and experts had expected.

"This has been a challenging year to read the trees," said Jeff Reinbold, NPS superintendent for the national mall and memorial parks. One of the warmest winters on record, plus dramatic fluctuations in temperature

have essentially sent confusing signals to the trees. The end results, Reinbold said, are trees that he compared to a hormonal teenager. "There's a lot going on in there," he said.

Cherry Blossom Festival President Diana Mayhew said this year's bloom dates aren't unprecedented, but they're the second earliest she had witnessed in 23 years with the organization. As a result, her organization has accelerated their own timetable, moving up multiple events planned at the

Tidal Basin by a week. Mayhew said she and city officials are expecting a boom year for the festival, which typically signals the unofficial start of D.C.'s tourist season. The 2020 cherry blossom season was essentially wrecked in real time by the creeping shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was moving across the country just as the festival was holding press conferences. Organizers finally were forced to cancel most in-person events. □

China dismisses FBI statement on COVID-19 lab leak theory

BEIJING (AP) — For the second day in a row, China on Wednesday dismissed U.S. suggestions that the COVID-19 pandemic may have been triggered by a virus that leaked from a Chinese laboratory.

Responding to comments by FBI Director Christopher Wray, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said the involvement of the U.S. intelligence community was evidence enough of the "politicization of origin tracing."

"By rehashing the lab-leak theory, the U.S. will not succeed in discrediting China, and instead, it will only hurt its own credibility," Mao said.

"We urge the U.S. to respect science and facts ... stop turning origin tracing into something about politics and intelligence, and stop disrupting social solidarity and origins cooperation," she said.

In an interview with Fox News that aired Tuesday, Wray said, "The FBI has for quite some time now assessed that the origins of the pandemic are most likely a potential lab incident in (central China's



People wearing face masks walk past rows of lanterns at a tourist shopping street in Beijing, Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2023.

Associated Press

Wuhan."

"Here you are talking about a potential leak from a Chinese government-controlled lab," Wray said.

Referring to efforts to trace the origin of the coronavirus, he added, "I will just make the observation that the Chinese government, it seems to me, has been doing its best to try to thwart and obfuscate the work here, the work that we're doing, the work that our U.S. government and close foreign partners are doing. And that's unfortunate for everybody."

On Tuesday, Mao pushed

back at a report from the U.S. Department of Energy that assessed with "low confidence" that the virus that was first detected in Wuhan in late 2019 leaked from a nearby government laboratory.

The report hasn't been made public and officials in Washington stressed that U.S. agencies are not in agreement on the origin of the virus.

Mao on Tuesday insisted that China has been "open and transparent" in the search for the virus' origins and has "shared the most data and research results

on virus tracing and made important contributions to global virus tracing research." A World Health Organization expert group said last year that "key pieces of data" to explain how the pandemic began were still missing. The scientists cited avenues of research that were needed, including studies evaluating the role of wild animals and environmental studies in places where the virus might have first spread.

The Associated Press has previously reported that the Chinese government was strictly controlling research into the origin of the pandemic that has killed more than 6.8 million people worldwide, clamping down on some work and promoting fringe theories that it could have come from outside the country. Some scientists are open to the lab-leak theory, but many scientists believe the virus came from animals, mutated, and jumped to people, as has happened with other viruses in the past. Experts say the origin of the pandemic may not be known for many years — if ever. □

Report criticizes Dutch protection system after 3 slayings

By MIKE CORDER
Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A critical report into the protection of three murder victims, including a celebrated Dutch journalist gunned down in central Amsterdam, said Wednesday that security services in a "fragmented" protection system didn't always act on tips about possible threats. The conclusions highlighted flaws in a network involving police and prosecutors that is intended to offer protection to people facing threats ranging from stalkers to possible attacks by criminals and terrorists. The report came following an 18-month government-commissioned investigation by the Dutch Safety Board into the slayings of crime reporter Peter R. de Vries, lawyer Derk Wiersum and the brother of a key witness in the trial of an al-

leged Dutch crime gang. De Vries, who was shot on an Amsterdam street on July 21, 2021, and died nine days later acted as a confidential advisor to the witness. Wiersum, the witness' lawyer, was gunned down on Sept. 18, 2019, outside his home in Amsterdam. The witness' brother, identified only Reduan, was shot and killed March 29, 2018. The witness played a key role in the prosecution of Ridouan Taghi, who is accused by prosecutors of multiple murders in the violent Dutch criminal underworld. Judges are expected to deliver verdicts later this year in the trial of Taghi and several alleged accomplices.

The report said that "command of the surveillance and protection of the persons under threat was fragmented across national and regional organisations"



Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries looks on, prior to attending a live TV show in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Thursday Jan. 31, 2008.

Associated Press

and the protection service "did not receive all the information about the threat that was available to the investigation."

It added that "signals" of possible threats from the victims "were not regarded as concrete threat information and therefore did not fit into the usual system."

Both Wiersum and De Vries had police surveillance at their homes. De Vries "was not willing to share his schedule to make it possible to organize surveillance for his arrivals and departures. He also made no use of the option to personally notify any high-risk moments," the report said. □

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Fiery Greece train collision kills 32, injures at least 85

By COSTAS KANTOURIS and DEREK GATOPoulos

Associated Press

TEMPE, Greece (AP) — A passenger train carrying hundreds of people collided at high speed with an oncoming freight train in a fiery wreck in northern Greece, killing 32 and injuring at least 85, officials said Wednesday.

Multiple cars derailed and at least three burst into flames after the collision near the town of Tempe on Tuesday just before midnight. Rescue crews illuminated the scene with floodlights before dawn on Wednesday as they searched frantically through the twisted, smoking wreckage for survivors.

Survivors said several passengers were thrown through the windows of the train cars due to the impact. They said others fought to free themselves after the passenger train buckled, slamming into a field next to the tracks near a gorge about 380 kilometers (235 miles) north of Athens where major highway and rail tunnels are located.

"There were many big



Smoke rises from trains as firefighters and rescuers operate after a collision near Larissa city, Greece, early Wednesday, March 1, 2023.

Associated Press

pieces of steel," said Vassilis Polyzos, a local resident who was one of the first people on the scene. "The trains were completely destroyed, both passenger and freight trains."

He said dazed and disoriented people were escaping out of the train's rear cars as he arrived.

"People, naturally, were scared — very scared," he

said. "They were looking around, searching; they didn't know where they were."

The trains crashed just before the Vale of Tempe, a gorge that separates the regions of Thessaly and Macedonia. Costas Agorastos, the regional governor of the Thessaly area, told Greece's Skai television the two trains crashed

head on at high speed. "Carriage one and two no longer exist, and the third has derailed," he said.

Rescuers wearing head lamps worked in thick smoke, pulling pieces of mangled metal from the cars to search for trapped people. Others scoured the field with flashlights and checked underneath the wreckage. Several of the

dead are believed to have been found in the restaurant area near the front of the passenger train.

Hospital officials in the nearby city of Larissa said at least 25 of those hurt had serious injuries.

"The evacuation process is ongoing and is being carried out under very difficult conditions due to the severity of the collision between the two trains," said Vassilis Varthakoyiannis, a spokesperson for Greece's firefighting service.

The possible cause of the collision was not immediately clear. Two rail officials were being questioned by police but had not been detained.

Passengers who received minor injuries or were unharmed were transported by bus to Thessaloniki, 130 kilometers (80 miles) to the north. Police took their names as they arrived, in an effort to track anyone who may be missing.

A teenage survivor who did not give his name told reporters that just before the crash he felt a strong braking and saw sparks and then there was a sudden stop. □

Ice Age Europeans found refuge in Spain, doom in Italy



This image provided by the Max Planck Institute shows a male skull with stone tools from Gross Fredenwalde, Germany, dated to about 7,000 years ago.

Associated Press

By FRANK JORDANS

BERLIN (AP) — New research reveals that the hunter-gatherer people who dominated Europe 30,000 years ago sought refuge from the last Ice Age in warmer places, but

only those who sheltered in what is now Spain and Portugal appear to have survived.

Using new genetic analysis of prehistoric human remains, scientists were able to trace the fate of

the Gravettian culture, a term used to describe the people who once roamed Europe and produced distinctive tools and art such as the voluptuous 'Venus' figurines found at ancient sites across the continent.

The study, published Wednesday in the journal Nature, highlights the impact that climate change and migration had on the early inhabitants of Europe. It suggests that those who lived in what is now Italy when the ice expanded southward some 25,000 years ago appeared to have found themselves in a dead end compared to their cousins who lived in region that now covers parts of southern France, Spain and Portugal.

Those who went west survived the worst of the Ice Age, known to scientists as the last glacial maximum,

said Cosimo Posth, a researcher at the University of Tuebingen who led the study.

"To our big surprise, in Italy the population that was present before the last glacial maximum completely disappears," said Posth. "They didn't make it."

Genetic analysis of individuals from Italy after the last Ice Age shows the dark-skinned, dark-eyed Gravettian population was replaced by newcomers from the Balkans, who brought blue eyes and a touch of Near Eastern ancestry with them.

The researchers analyzed 116 new genetic samples they added to 240 ancient specimens already known, covering a span from about 45,000 to 5,000 years ago.

The Gravettians who survived the Ice Age in Spain,

meanwhile, mixed with migrants from the east as Europe warmed again almost 15,000 years ago and then swiftly repopulated the continent from Iberia to Poland and the British Isles, dominating it for thousands of years.

The genetic footprint of the Gravettians can be found in the last Spanish hunter-gatherer populations until the arrival of the first farmers, who migrated to Europe from Anatolia some 8,000 years ago, said Posth. In an accompanying commentary published by Nature, Ludovic Orlando of the Center for Anthropobiology and Genomics in Toulouse, France, said the study showed how climate change affected populations in Europe and that ancient human cultures weren't always ethnically homogenous. □

Solid tourism performance drove Aruban economy in the third quarter of 2022

(Oranjestad)—Today, the Centrale Bank van Aruba (CBA) published the State of the Economy report for the third quarter of 2022. The publication contains national, as well as international economic developments. The highlights of this publication are presented below.

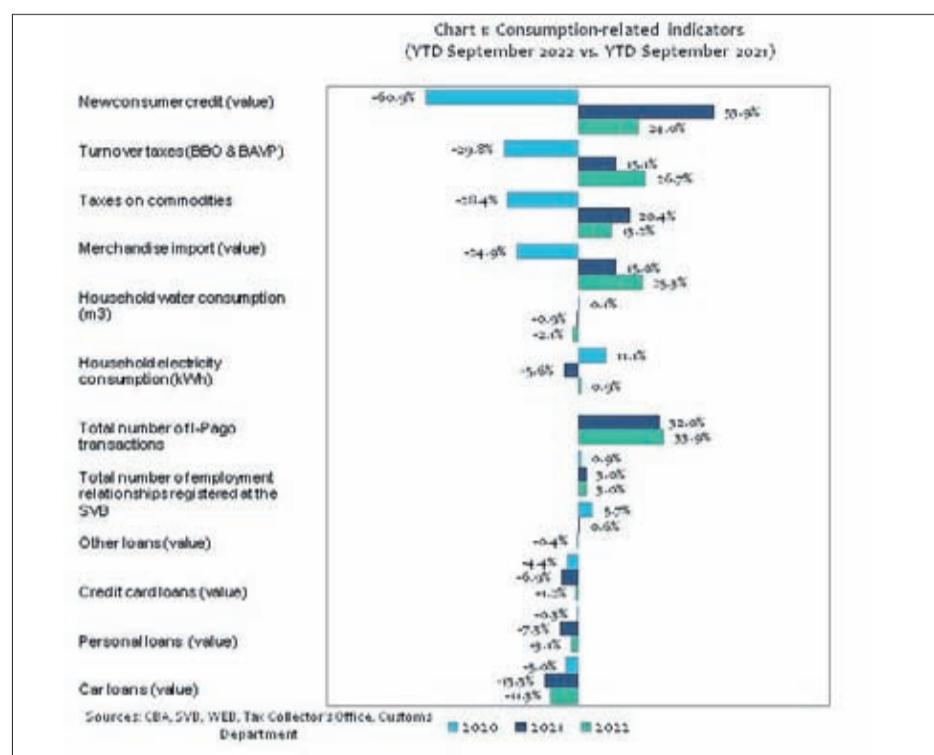
In the first nine months of 2022, the Aruban economy grew by 12.1 percent compared to the same period in 2021. A strong tourism performance in terms of stay-over visitors and tourism expenditures mainly drove the registered growth in real GDP. Moreover, observed consumption and investment indicators painted a primarily positive picture, thereby contributing to economic activity.

The tourism industry in Aruba registered upturns in stay-over visitors (+44.0 percent) and visitor nights (+40.9 percent) in the first three quarters of 2022. Compared to 2019, total stay-over visitors recovered by 96.2 percent (YTD Q3 2022 vs. YTD Q3 2019) and total visitor nights by 94.5 percent (YTD Q3 2022 vs. YTD Q3 2019). The surge in stay-over visitors, due in large part to an expansion in the U.S. market, was evident in hotel performance (Table 1.). Higher tourism demand drove up hotel occupancy and the average daily rate, leading to improved RevPAR and increased total tourism revenue (registered at commercial banks). Data on “other accommodations” also showed a positive development during the first nine months of 2022, registering more extensive growth than that of high-rise hotels, low-rise hotels, and timeshares. The gradual recovery of cruise visitors

also contributed to tourism performance in the period under review.

Consumption-related indicators painted a mostly positive picture of the first nine months of 2022, compared to the same period of the previous year (Chart 1). Turnover taxes (BBO & BAVP) and taxes on commodities recorded an increase. Compared to the same period in 2019, turnover taxes (BBO & BAVP) expanded, while taxes on commodities lagged. The positive development in turnover taxes and taxes on commodities, compared to the same period of the previous year, reflected the continued strong performance of the tourism sector, the related boost to domestic consumption, and the higher prices of goods and services. The latter developments, in turn, led to an expansion (+25.9 percent) of the trade deficit.

During the period under review, investment indicators improved; however, some gains were inflation induced. For example, the nominal import value of construction materials rose. Nonetheless, the import weight of construction materials (a proxy for real imports) contracted compared to the first nine months of 2021. Similarly, the growth in the import weight of base metals and derived work, and the import weight of machinery and electrical equipment, were smaller than the expansion in their nominal import values. On the other hand, in the first three quarters of 2022, new commercial and housing mortgages surged compared to the first three quarters of 2021.



At the end of September 2022, the consumer price index (CPI) stood at 106.2, a hike of 7.0 percent compared to the same period in 2021.

Increases in the housing and transport components and the continued expansion in the food and nonalcoholic beverages component mostly fueled the uptick in the CPI. The end-of-period core inflation (excluding food and energy components) continued its rise to 2.4 percent compared to September 2021, pushed up in large part by the component purchase of vehicles, reflecting higher vehicle prices. Furthermore, continuing its upward trend, the 12-month average inflation rate reached 4.7 percent in September 2022. Higher gasoline and food prices were the main drivers of this increase. The 12-month average core inflation also rose to 2.0 percent. Nevertheless, the real exchange rate for the Aruban florin vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar trended downwards during the first three quarters of 2022. This downward trend results from consumer prices in the United States rising faster than those in Aruba.

International transactions settled through the banking sector resulted in a significant net foreign exchange inflow of Afl. 197.6 million in the first three quarters of 2022 (Table 2). Consequently, international reserves (excluding revaluation differences) climbed to Afl. 3,087.2 million at the end of September 2022. This outcome resulted from a net inflow of foreign exchange on the current account that outweighed recorded net outflows on the financial and

capital accounts. The net foreign exchange inflow on the current account was mainly driven by the services account, particularly, tourism export services.

In the first nine months of 2022, government finance data revealed that the government's financial deficit narrowed to Afl. 54.9 million from Afl. 459.3 million in the same period of 2021. This outturn resulted from a sharp decline in government expenditure and a jump in government revenues. This significant improvement in government finance stemmed from improved economic performance related to the continued strong recovery of the tourism sector and the absence of social and business assistance programs in place during 2020 and 2021. All tax components, with the exception of taxes on income and profits, showed advancement compared to their respective 2019 levels.

At the end of September 2022, government debt expanded by Afl. 161.1 million to Afl. 5,816.7 million compared to December 2021.

This expansion resulted largely from loans received by the Government of Aruba (GoA) from the Netherlands to repay external debt and for its liquidity needs. At the end of the period under review, economic growth led to a decline in the estimated debt-to-GDP bringing it down to 91.2 percent from 101.0 percent at the end of 2021.

The complete publication is available on the CBA's website. (<https://www.cbaruba.org/document/state-of-the-economy>).

Table 1: Tourism indicators for Aruba (Sources: ATA, AHATA, APA, CTO, STR)
(YTD Sep 2022 vs. YTD Sep 2021)

	2021	2022
Stayover visitors		
Average length of stay (in days)	367.088	216.621
Total visitor nights	7.9	7.4
Arrival visitors	4,657,450	3,024,724
Hotel occupancy (%)	79.4%	55.8%
Average daily rate (US\$)	132.8	104.2
Revenue per available room (RevPAR) (US\$)	134.6	114.5
Tourism revenue per night* (Only those registered at commercial banks, in Arf.)	44.6	43.4
Tourism revenue* (in Arf. million)	1,824.2	1,664.7

Table 2: Balance of payments (in Arf. million) (Source: CBA)

	2021 Q3-Q4	2022 Q3-Q4
Current account	1.8	3.754
Goods	-1,119	-1,541
Services	+1,234.5	2,013.8
Primary income	-87.4	-120.0
Secondary income	+2.3	-3.6
Capital account	31.9	-6.3
Financial account	500.8	-19.1
Direct investment	+67.1	+63.4
Portfolio investment	-77.2	-126.4
Financial derivatives	37.5	-4.7
Other investment	500.3	62.5
Foreign accounts	+51.1	-46.4
Items not yet classified	-47.4	-83.0
Change in international reserves (excluding revaluation differences)	38.9	197.6



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Paseo Herencia is always fun and exciting to visit



NOORD— Paseo Herencia offers a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment options in an outdoor

center located in the heart of Palm Beach – walking distance from the high-rise hotels.



Shopping

The Paseo Herencia stores offer a great collection in beach wear, clothing, perfume, shoes, jewelry, souvenirs and much more. Pamper yourself by visiting Maggy's and enjoy their salon services and shop for your favorite beauty products. Aruba Aloe has that perfect gift to bring back home, all made with natural ingredients. Other brand favorites are Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Aldo, Carmen Steffens, Nike store, Pandora and many more.

Restaurants

Start with a breakfast meal at Paseo Herencia offering unique breakfast options such as Drunk's Denial with their Make it Your Own Crêpe Bar offering



sweet and savory crêpe flavors and the option to booze it up with their Mimosa crêpe (mandarin soaked in champagne), Pina Colada (pineapples in coconut rum), Bourbon Apple, Brandy Apricot, Whiskey Pear and more. Location can be found by following the bakery smell upon arrival. Another option is Seabarita offering you delicious breakfast options ranging from Huevos Rancheros to empanadas surrounded by a cozy picnic setting with streetside view. Go Argentinian style at Che Bar and try their delicious omelet with chorizo/ham, mozzarella, onions, peppers, and tomatoes served with skillet potatoes and toast. Looking for something for the whole family? Visit TGI Fridays and choose between waffle, omelets, breakfast sandwiches and tacos starting at \$8. These restaurants are also open for lunch & dinner offering you a variety of cuisine choices. If you're looking for more unique concepts, join us for dinner at Xixon Restaurant greatly known in Miami for their Spanish inspired dishes with top notch flavors and the largest wine variety or visit

have a good time at the Bulldog Aruba located in the center of the Plaza. Open till late.

VIP Cinema

Visit the one-of-a-kind Caribbean Cinemas VIP on the second floor of Paseo Herencia and enjoy your favorite movies in the most comfortable reclining seats with high quality screens with the latest projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound and not to forget their delicious buttery bag of popcorn.

Entertainment

Catch live shows from Monday to Thursday and Sunday at 8pm on the Paseo center stage and the nightly water shows at 7:30pm, 8:30pm and 9:30pm. Looking for some adrenaline? Visit the Airsoft experience located behind The Lazy Turtle. Snap Instagramable pictures at the Angel Wings located between Pandora and Free Spirit or the Flying mosaic hearts located behind King Churros. Parking up to two hours is free when shopping, dining or catching a movie at Paseo Herencia. Just present your purchase receipt at our parking cashier.

To learn more about our specials and events, visit the Paseo Herencia website www.paseoherencia.com.

beauty & THE BEACH

Aruba Today is delighted to share to its readers a new segment called "Beauty and the Beach", where we take a minute to honor our guests who have decided to spend their vacation on our beautiful and warm island.

In this edition, we'd like to give a shout out to **Wes, Sarah and family from Michigan in the US**, who shared with us that they love the friendly locals. Aruba is always proud to host all families and guests. We at Aruba Today encourage any visitor of the island to send in their pictures and/or messages; who knows? You might get on the cover!

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Coming Soon: Auntie Anne's Pretzels

Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitors at the RIU Palace



PALM BEACH - Recently, Aruba Tourism Authority representative Ms. Kimberley Richardson had the great pleasure in honoring many loyal Aruba visitors with their distinctive certificates. These certificates are a way to say "Masha Danki" for continuously choosing Aruba as a favorite vacation destination. The titles are as following: 10+ years "Distinguished Visitor", 20+ years "Goodwill Ambassador" and 36+ years "Emerald Ambassador".

The honoree was Mrs. Tina Klemm from New York, United States who was honored as an Emerald Ambassador.

This symbolic honorary title is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba between the 10-20-35 and more consecutive year mark.

The greatest award we provide is the Emerald Ambassador certificate, which is granted to travelers who have visited Aruba continuously for 35 years or more. The ceremony was significant to us because it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to celebrate guests who had been coming to Aruba for more than 35 years. Mrs. Klemm has been coming to Aruba for 50 years consecutively! The first time she visited Aruba was back in 1973.

The top reasons for returning to Aruba for Mrs. Tina Klemm were the quality time she gets to spend with her friends and family, Aruba's nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, Aruba's warm & friendly people, Aruba's year-round sunny weather and Aruba's delicious variety of foods.

Ms. Kimberley Richardson representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and members of the RIU Palace bestowed the honor certification to the honoree, presented her with gifts, and also thanked her for choosing Aruba as her favorite vacation destination and as her home-away-from-home. □



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History of fishing in Aruba

ORANJESTAD — Fishing has been a family tradition for ages in Aruba. Our ancestors used to fish for a living. Even though nowadays you don't see them often we still have some passionate fishermen on the island that go out every day in search for fish to feed their families and serve our local market. One of these fisherman is Gregory Wernet.

The so-called Continental Bank between Aruba and the opposite coast reaches a depth of about 650 feet. The sea is very rich in fish here. Since the time of the indigenous native people fish and other sea creatures such as turtles, octopus, squids, conch and many type of crustaceans have formed a means of subsistence for the native Aruban inhabitants. Especially along the west coast of the island where the fishing grounds are settlements of fishermen. Until the arrival of the oil -industry Aruban fishermen could supply Aruba's wants.

As a source of income, however, fishing did not amount too much. In the beginning of the 1900's approximately 160 people earn their living in this branch of this industry. Rancho, which stands for a shed, nowadays east Oranjestad, was the head quarter and remains the fishermen's settlement. Savaneta, Noord, Santa Cruz

all had their fishermen's villages. At a rough estimate there were about a hundred small fishing boats during that time.

The Arubans were mainly engaged in coastal fishing, using rowing-boats or small sailing-boats, and lines or dragnets and canisters in shallow water. When fishing with deep-sea lines just over the bottom of the sea the boat is kept in place by means of a piece of rock serving as an anchor. The two most important species of fish by far caught in this manner are the pargo or red snappers and a variety of groupers like the mero, jeanpao and the wovo di boyo.

Cruising off the coast the Aruban fisherman patiently waits for a fish willing to snap at the bait on the drag-line, in nets and traps. Veritable giants are sometimes caught. Barracudas weigh from 9 to 44 pounds and measure from 3 to almost 7 feet. The king-fish has a weight from 22 to 44 pounds; the moclaf may tip the scales at 155, whilst garfish, having a length of nine feet, weigh over 132 pounds.

Most fish caught is used for their own consumption, to feed their families and some are being sold in the market to local restaurants.

Fisherman Gregory Wernet



Gregory Wernet is a well-known fisherman from Santa Cruz. His father taught him fishing when he was a small child. Gregory has two sons, Jordan and Jordanny, which he taught fishing too, when they were only 3 years old and he takes them fishing with him. Fishing has been a family tradition for quite a long time and even his grandson Willvion of 7 years old is following his grandfather steps. This is the sixth generation of fishermen in their family.

They go deep sea fishing. There they catch red snapper, grouper and amberjack. They usually fish for 15 hours a day, but now due to the covid-19 measurements they go fishing from 5 in the morning until

line tank, lights and some food and beverages. For bait he uses sardines, squid and the small fish known in Aruba as piskechi. They have two boats they use for fishing. 'Virgen del Valle' which is parked at the pier by the Seaport and 'Padrot' which they have at home.

The fish they catch they take home to their families and they also sell it to their clients. Gregory is proud to be a fisherman. It is a honest and humble job but with it he is able to feed his family even during hard times. It is a very dangerous job and you have to spend many hours on the sea, waiting patiently and risking your life while fighting a big fish and big waves but the adrenaline it brings with it but also just sitting there listening to the sound of the waves and enjoying the marvelous view that nature has to offer is all worth it. □

Source: Etnia Nativa



Jair Dijkhoff 'Casper': "Aruba needs to unite in music, support each other, show respect and show love"

(Oranjestad)—He is a young man whose talent in the last few months surpassed expectations when he made both young and old dance to the phrase "Feeling good...feeling nice". Our reporter sat down with Jair Dijkhof 'Casper', the king of Aruba Caiso and Soca Monarch 2023, Winner of Roadjam 2023 and artist of the year according to several media outlets.

Jair Dijkhof, better known as Casper, is a young man raised in several neighborhoods in Tanki Leendert, Noord, Madiki and Dakota. From a very young age, Casper started his singing career. Then he played baseball and by the age

of 13 or 14, he joined the brass band, which became a part of his life to this day. At 20 years old, he volunteered in different activities in order to build a base to do many things. He currently works at WEB in the Receipt Department.

He further told our reporter that he joined the radio industry, where he hosts a radio program called "Jai-goo's Groovyhour" from 5pm to 7pm every day. In 2022, he decided to participate in the biggest a music event on the island, which was the "Caiso and Soca Monarch". It is here that his origin story in the soca world started. This year, he won the honorary titles of Rockie of the year and Ra-

dio Jam Artist of Carnaval at Roadjam.

"I always loved soca and it's one of my favorite music genre, and this crazy idea became a reality thanks to my Mighty Campo ta helped me: Sergio Barros, Jeronim Lampe, Hubert Thiel," he said.

When he got up on stage for the first time to perform the song that everyone now asks radios to play, Jair expressed that he felt very nervous: "My heart was beating out of my chest, but once I got on stage and saw the audience, my nerves went away and I got real excited."

When Jair won the winning title at the Caiso and Soca Monarch, there were certain opinions that noted that Caiso and Soca is a genre of San Nicolas. This caused uproar online and certain people in media even addressed this.

About this topic, Jair had this to say: "I got a lot of criticism from big-named people known at San Nicolas that see me winning as bad, but everyone has their opinions. I respect everyone and I will keep the same charisma and love for everyone, as well as the respect for different opinions. They have the right to make their own decisions and to express themselves,



and it doesn't faze me, because I don't focus on the negative, but the positive." Moreover, he affirmed that young people have more of a chance now to "expand our carnival and Caiso and Soca Monarch. I don't think we should tear each other down, but Aruba needs to unite in music; we can accomplish bigger things instead of criticizing each other."

Now that the carnival season has passed, Jair informs that he will be pursuing other projects in mind and that people will be hearing

from him again this year: "We will be releasing two or three new songs this year God willing."

To finalize, Jair would like to relay his message: "In order to keep supporting each other, show respect, show love—not to just expand our carnival, but our culture too, I hope to see more young people willing to achieve their dreams in life, or to chase any crazy idea they may have. I hope to see a united and blessed Aruba, with many successes in the future for everyone." □



THURSDAY 2 MARCH 2023

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 45 Lose
1 Knights' traction

5 "Wait a minute!"

11 Brad Pitt movie

12 Incite Douce"

13 Amo, —, amat (Latin lesson)

14 Drinking establishment

15 Kitschy quality

17 Skirt edge

18 Joel Coen's brother

22 Hotel units

24 Boosted

25 "Aladdin" monkey

26 Right away

27 Suggest

30 Yard tools

32 Minuscule

33 Writer Tan

34 Curved sword

38 Drinking establishment

41 Departed

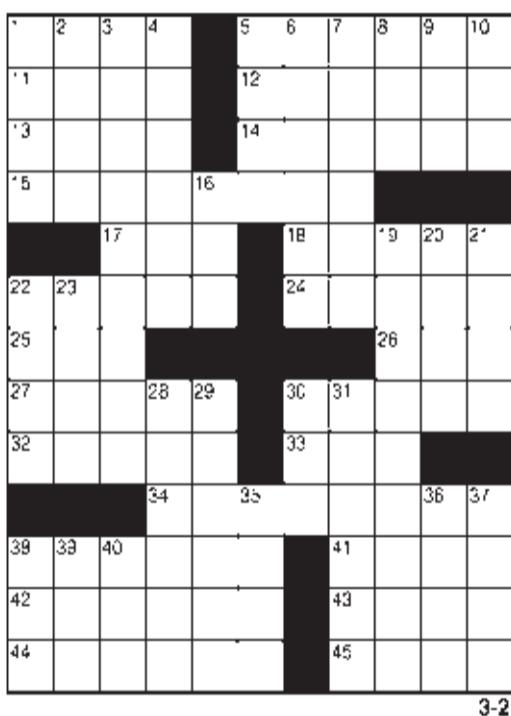
42 Arthurian island

43 Player's fee

44 Draws toward midnight



Yesterday's answer



3-2

A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-2 CRYPTOQUOTE

R B W U B I U X R D U N W U . H L H

O U M U R Z M X I N U N B I X N U R U M Z

H R E X I N , O C X Z Q B B D O B A E N H

Q M H I Y : " C B O Z B Q A H E N X

Q B X Z , " — R Z U G U I O M H Y C Z

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: POWER IS BEING TOLD YOU'RE NOT LOVED AND NOT BEING DESTROYED BY IT. MADONNA

Should you get a home improvement loan from your contractor?

By ANNIE MILLERBERND
of NerdWallet

Using a general contractor who offers home improvement financing seems convenient, especially if they're standing in your kitchen ready to start as soon as you pay them. Contractors who offer loans usually work with third parties that specialize in home improvement financing. While there are benefits to the arrangement, even a highly recommended contractor may not give you financing that fits your needs, so it pays to shop around. Here's what to know about contractor financing options and alternatives to consider.

RATES ARE TIED TO CREDIT, NOT EQUITY

Many contractors offer unsecured personal loans, which don't require you to have equity in your home or use it as collateral.

Instead, your credit profile and financial information determine whether you qualify and the rate you receive. The lowest rates go to borrowers with good credit. No collateral means a lender can't take your property if you fail to repay, but it also means the rate could be high. Atlanta-area certified financial planner Jovan Johnson says. Contractors may subsidize the loans through their financing partnerships, effectively lowering your interest rate, says David Zalik, founder and CEO of GreenSky, a platform owned by Goldman Sachs that helps provide loans through contractors. □

Classifieds

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216297

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 Week 10/Unit 1207 (17k);
 Week 13/Unit 1509 (14k);
 Week 14/Unit 1308 (14k); and,
 Week 15/Unit 1217 (10k).
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216163

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Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

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Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

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American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

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Fundacion Contra Violencia
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How the 'Daisy Jones' cast went from beginners to bandmates

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Sam Claflin is the first to admit that when he got the part of Billy Dunne, the co-lead singer of a world-famous 1970s rock band in "Daisy Jones & the Six," he was no musician.

Claflin was the last person cast. His co-stars had already begun rehearsing at a band camp where the actors learned to play their designated instruments and perform original songs written for the show.

"They said, 'OK, there's about 15 songs you're going to need to learn. Oh, and can you play guitar?'" Claflin recounted. "I didn't play guitar and I barely had sung. I never recorded anything. It was quite an immediate shock of terror and fear and pressure."

One might assume that, on the other hand, Riley Keough — inhabiting the titular role in the Amazon Prime limited series premiering Friday — had the music part in the bag. After all, as the granddaughter of Elvis Presley and the daughter of Lisa Marie Presley, Keough practically has music in her genes.

But Keough said singing did not come naturally, especially singing for an audience. She could carry a tune and submitted a "sort of soft" song for her audition but was told she needed to belt out the lyrics to play frontwoman Daisy Jones.

"I sounded awful the first few times I tried," Keough admitted.



This combination of photos shows, from left, Riley Keough, Sam Claflin and Camila Morrone, cast members in the Amazon miniseries "Daisy Jones and the Six," posing for a portrait at the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles on Feb. 21, 2023.

Associated Press

To play a band as beloved as Daisy Jones & The Six is in the universe created by author Taylor Jenkins Reid, lip-syncing to someone else's vocals was never on the table, co-executive producer Lauren Neustadter said. Neustadter produced the adaptation alongside Reese Witherspoon, who had to sing her own vocals for her Oscar-winning performance as June Carter Cash in "Walk the Line."

"Reese and I had so many conversations," said Neustadter. "She knew what a challenge it would be, but she also knew exactly what was possible."

"Daisy Jones & The Six" follows a band that skyrockets to fame, helmed by lead singers with amazing onstage chemistry and a tumultuous behind-the-scenes relationship. Decades after the band suddenly and inexplicably (to the public) breaks up, they speak for the first time about their rise and demise. The writers wanted to create a realistic story that

would feel accurate to musicians. Kim Gordon from Sonic Youth spoke to the writers room once a week as a consultant.

"She spoke to what it's like to be onstage and to have this electricity happen around you," co-showrunner Will Graham said.

And expectations were high for the transcendent songs Keough, Claflin and the ensemble would have to belt. Enter Blake Mills, a Grammy winner who has worked with Alabama Shakes, John Legend, Bob Dylan and Jay-Z and was tapped as the show's executive music producer.

Mills wrote or co-wrote 25 tracks created for the series, alongside the likes of Phoebe Bridgers, Jackson Browne and Marcus Mumford. (None of the lyrics included in the book were used.)

Atlantic Records will release an album featuring 11 original songs also on Friday.

The first two singles "Look At Us Now (Honeycomb)" and "Regret Me" are out now.



This combination of photos shows, from left, Suki Waterhouse, Josh Whitehouse, Nabiyah Be and Sebastian Chacon, cast members in the Amazon miniseries "Daisy Jones and the Six," posing for portraits at the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles on Feb. 21, 2023.

Associated Press

Additional original music from the series will also be released digitally each week.

The unexpected year-and-a-half production delay — induced by the coronavirus pandemic, subsequent filming backlog and a long waiting list to use stages — helped Claflin get to where he needed to be musically. "Any actor will say, I think, the more time you are gifted for preparation, the better ... but I needed to climb a huge mountain," he said. of the delay giving him more time to rehearse, both in and outside of band camp.

Suki Waterhouse, who plays keyboardist Karen Sirko, said all the work that went into their music scenes helped make her a better performer.

"The two things that I'm most passionate about, I got to put together in this project. ... I've been putting out music for many years, but playing Karen guided me to make the record that I really wanted to make,"

Waterhouse said. "I've now done like 70 shows and two tours and have a label and all these things that I didn't have before I played Karen, so I have a lot to be really grateful to the show for." While Waterhouse was already a recording artist, other actors relished in the opportunity to live out their rock star fantasies. Sebastian Chacon, who portrays Warren Rhodes, played drums in middle school and early high school but the kind of music he learned in band class was very different than the drumming he did on "Daisy Jones."

"Everybody wants to be a rock star, but it takes a lot of work and hustle," Chacon said. "To be able to just skip the line and pretend to be a big famous rock star, I was like, 'Wow, amazing, fantastic.'"

Josh Whitehouse, who plays Eddie Roundtree, also had music experience. He began playing with bands at 16 years old and continued performing for 10 years "until acting took over." □



Members of the band Kiss, from left, Tommy Thayer, Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons and Eric Singer attend the premiere of A&E Network's "Biography: KISSStory" in New York on June 11, 2021.

Associated Press

Kiss reveal last dates of their farewell tour, ending in NYC

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Rockers Kiss have announced the final shows of their last tour: The band plans to hang up their platform boots after two back-to-back shows at Madison Square Garden in New York at the end of 2023.

The last leg of the band's 17-date North American tour kicks off in October in Texas and hits California,

Washington, Canada, Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois, Maryland and then culminates in their hometown's famous venue on Dec. 1 and Dec. 2.

"Kiss was born in New York City. On 23rd Street. Half a century ago. It will be a privilege and honor to finish touring at Madison Square Garden, 10 blocks and 50 years from where we first started," said the band in a

statement.

The band is currently made up of original members Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons as well as Eric Singer and Tommy Thayer. Their best-known songs include "Rock and Roll All Nite," "I Was Made for Lovin' You" and "Detroit Rock City."

Tickets will be available to the public on March 10 at livenation.com. □

Rodgers says decision on future will come 'soon enough'

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Aaron Rodgers says he will make a decision on his future "soon enough" as the four-time MVP quarterback ponders whether to play next season and if his future remains with the Green Bay Packers.

Rodgers, 39, discussed his future while speaking on an episode of the "Aubrey Marcus Podcast" that was released Wednesday morning. He spent much of the 1 1/2-hour conversation describing his recent isolation retreat in which he said he spent four days alone in a dark room.

"There's a finality to the decision," Rodgers said. "I don't make it lightly. I don't want to drag anybody around."

The podcast was released one day after Packers general manager Brian Gutekunst was asked about Rodgers and said that they "haven't had the conversations that we need to have yet." Gutekunst indicated he hoped a decision was made by the start of free agency on March 15.

"There's been some contact back and forth," Gutekunst said. "Obviously he's had some things on his plate. Hopefully those things will



Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers walks off the field after an NFL football game against the Detroit Lions, Sunday, Jan. 8, 2023, in Green Bay, Wis.

Associated Press

happen soon."

Gutekunst also indicated that he believes 2020 first-round pick Jordan Love is ready to be an NFL starting quarterback. Love has backed up Rodgers the past three seasons.

Rodgers, who is due to make about \$59.5 million if he plays, noted that "for everyone involved, directly and indirectly it's best for a decision earlier."

He referenced the latter

stages of Brett Favre's career in Green Bay, when the Packers didn't know whether the Hall of Fame quarterback would play or retire. Rodgers backed up Favre for the first three seasons of his career.

Favre did retire in the spring of 2008 before changing his mind, leading the Packers to trade him to the New York Jets because they already had announced Rodgers as their starter.

"Look, I'm answering questions about it because I get asked about it," Rodgers said. "I'm talking about it because it's important to me. If you don't like it and think it's drama, me being a diva or whatever, just tune it out. That's fine. But this is my life. It's important to me. I'll make a decision soon enough and we'll go down that road and be really excited about it."

Rodgers has noted he

planned this retreat several months ago and that it wasn't planned specifically so that he could think about his football future. Rodgers said he wanted a chance to "disconnect from technology and from the world" and give himself "the gift of rest."

But the solitude did give him plenty of opportunities to consider the possibilities. Rodgers said he would have plenty of incentive if he does come back after a 2022 season in which he had his lowest passer rating as a starter after the Packers went 8-9 and missed the playoffs.

He compared it to the situation he faced heading into 2020, which marked the Packers' second year under coach Matt LaFleur and the season after the team drafted Love. Rodgers earned MVP honors in 2020 and 2021.

"I've been doubted before," Rodgers said. "Honestly I felt in the first year that Matt was here, Matt was in Green Bay in '19 and I felt at times like a game manager, like I didn't quite understand what we were doing at times on offense. My job was to take care of the football and I did. □

Judge: NFL coach can press discrimination claims in court

By LARRY NEUMEISTER

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — NFL Coach Brian Flores may get his day in court to press discrimination claims against the league and its teams after a federal judge on Wednesday rejected the argument that his lawsuit must be handled in arbitration, presumably before Commissioner Roger Goodell.

The written decision by Judge Valerie Caproni in Manhattan was issued months after lawyers for the league tried to get the lawsuit moved to arbitration, citing contracts that coaches had signed.

Flores sued the league and three teams a year ago, saying the league was "rife with racism," particularly in its hiring and promotion of

Black coaches.

The judge said Flores can let a jury decide the merits of his discrimination claims against the league, the Denver Broncos, the New York Giants and the Houston Texans, but he must pursue his claims against the Miami Dolphins through arbitration.

"We are pleased that Coach Flores' class claims of systematic discrimination against the NFL and several teams will proceed in court and ultimately before a jury of his peers," attorney Douglas Wigdor said in an email.

He added: "We are disappointed the court compelled arbitration of any claims before Mr. Goodell as he is obviously biased and unqualified to rule on these matters. We expect

him to delegate those matters to a truly neutral arbitrator as a matter of fundamental fairness."

The league did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press or say whether Goodell would recuse himself from the process.

Flores brought the lawsuit after he was fired by Miami, where he led the Dolphins to a 24-25 record over three years.

According to the lawsuit, Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross told Flores he would pay him \$100,000 for every loss during the coach's first season because he wanted the club to "tank" so it could get the draft's top pick.

The lawsuit alleged that Ross then pressured Flores to recruit a prominent



Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores stands on the sideline during the second half of an NFL football game against the New England Patriots, Jan. 9, 2022, in Miami Gardens, Fla.

Associated Press

quarterback in violation of the league's tampering rules. When Flores refused, he was cast as the "angry Black man" who is difficult to work with and was derided until he was fired, the suit said.

The Dolphins responded to the lawsuit when it was filed by saying it vehemently denied any allegations of racial discrimination and was "proud of the diversity and inclusion throughout our organization." □

New MLB rules get mixed fan reaction after first live looks

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.

(AP) — It took 2 hours, 19 minutes for the Miami Marlins to beat the Houston Astros 4-3 in a spring training game Monday — a game so fast that Ryan Murphy, a lifelong Houston fan, found himself lingering in the ballpark for a while after.

"I'm a baseball fan," said Murphy, wearing 2022 Astros World Series gear, "so if I stay here for four hours, for two hours, it doesn't matter to me."

Faced with criticism of dwindling cultural relevance and a laggardly product compared to other major sports, Major League Baseball introduced a set of new rules this year to speed up games and attract younger fans.

The bases are bigger to



New York Mets' Tommy Pham stands in the on-deck circle as a pitch clock counts down during the sixth inning of a spring training baseball game against the Washington Nationals Sunday, Feb. 26, 2023, in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Associated Press

improve player safety and may also encourage more aggressive baserunning. Pitchers can only disengage from the pitching rubber twice per plate

appearance. And there's a new pitch clock that gives players 30 seconds to resume play between batters. Between pitches, pitchers have 15 seconds

with nobody on and 20 seconds if there is a baserunner.

Less than a week into the spring training exhibition schedule, MLB seems to be getting what it wants, shaving about 20 minutes off the average length of games compared to last spring.

Players have been mostly pleased with the rollout.

"The game feels more exciting," Washington Nationals left-hander Patrick Corbin said. "Even some of the high-scoring games are under three hours."

Fans seeing the new-look sport for the first time this week have had mixed reviews. Some, like Murphy, are indifferent to the changes.

"It's irrelevant to us as fans,

honestly," said Murphy, who traveled from Utah to West Palm Beach for Houston's exhibition season. "Players might think something different of it, but for us it's all the same."

"How would I know the bases are bigger, honestly? I mean, we see a pitch clock out here, and we know it's there, but it doesn't matter to me."

Some fans like the idea of being in and out of a game in under three hours, which is about how long an average nine-inning baseball game lasted in 2022.

Others feel a nostalgic pull to how the sport has always been. "I'm not a big fan of the pitch count," said Mark Mezzatesta, who traveled to Florida from Queens in New York. "I feel like that's rushing the game. I feel it was fine the way it was. Pitchers do take a while. And batters do take a while, too. Fifteen seconds with nobody on base and 20 seconds with somebody on base is too short."

Barbara Schiffman of Roseland, New Jersey, said she's OK with some of the rules but "they should never let a game end on either the pitch clock or the batter clock."

She was referring to a recent game between Atlanta and Boston that ended in a tie after Braves prospect Cal Conley was assessed an automatic strike for a pitch clock violation. Conley originally thought he'd won the game with a two-out, bases-loaded walk but instead was given an at-bat-ending strike after the umpire said he wasn't set in the box as the clock wound under 8 seconds.

"When you get to that point in the game," Schiffman said, "you've got to let the game play out without the clock. That would be my only concern."

She also had a complaint about new limits on pitcher disengagements from the rubber. Pitchers can only attempt to pick off a runner twice — if they try a third pickoff and are unsuccessful, the runner gets to advance a base. □

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